

## IMPRESAS.

**I**N an article contributed to the 'Times' of the 27th of last December Mr. Sidney Lee announced the discovery of a new and interesting mention of Shakespeare in the household books of the Duke of Rutland at Belvoir Castle. It appears that in 1613 Thomas Screvin, steward of Francis, sixth Earl of Rutland, made the following entry under the general heading of 'Paymentes for howshold stuff, plate, armour, hammers, anvyles, and reparacions':

'Item, 31 Martii, to Mr. Shakespeare in gold about my Lord's impreso xliiij s; to Richard Burbage for paynting and making yt, in gold xliiij s—iiiij li. viij s.'

This 'impreso,' or more correctly 'impresa,' which we may define for the moment as a device or emblem with a motto, was invented, or possibly selected to grace the first appearance of the Earl at the annual tilting match held at Whitehall on the 'King's Day,' *i.e.*, the 24th of March, the anniversary of King James's accession, but unfortunately no description of it appears to have come down to us.

Mr. Lee discourses with his usual excellence about all that is known, or can at present be con-

jectured, respecting the circumstances under which Shakespeare and Burbage undertook this work, pointing out the friendship between the Earls of Rutland and Southampton, and the probability that Shakespeare was also known at Belvoir, through the dowager Countess of Rutland, a daughter of Sir Philip Sidney. But he seems to feel rather sad at the thought that Shakespeare should have wasted his time and energy on such a trivial matter as an *impresa*. Doubtless in the seventeenth century this 'futile fashion' of having an *impresa* deserves the harsh words which Mr. Lee showers unsparingly upon it, and may perhaps be compared to the assumption of crests and mottoes in our own day. From his point of view it is 'a foolish rage of which the beginnings are traced to Imperial Rome,' but a more extended investigation will show that the *impresa* is of much higher antiquity, and is associated with classical authors of whom not even Shakespeare need be ashamed.

Before quoting these ancient writers it will be well to give the definition of a true *impresa* from the earliest modern writer on the subject, Paolo Giovio. In his work, entitled, '*Dialogo dell' Imprese Militare et Amoroze*,' Rome, 1555, Giovio says that a true *impresa* consists of two parts, the device or emblem which is called the body, and the motto which is called the soul, and that the one should be complementary to the other, so that neither should have a perfectly evident meaning without the other. It is this combination of body and soul, symbolical in itself, that so much attracted cultivated minds in the sixteenth and seventeenth

centuries, and caused numbers of Italian dilettanti to collect impresas, and many to write about them as well. Among the number was the poet Tasso, whose dialogue was printed at Naples; it is now of extreme rarity, and no copy appears to exist in England. The mediaeval knight had no *impresa* in the strict sense of the word, but merely a device or badge, for it was not until the revival of learning and the study of the Greek dramatists that the real *impresa* was discovered. And here, as so often happens, the first is among the best. In the 'Seven against Thebes' of Aeschylus, written about five centuries before the Christian era, the hero Capaneus is described as bearing on his shield the device of Prometheus carrying a torch, with the motto, *πρήσω πόλιν*, 'I will burn down the city.' Now here we have an example of a true *impresa*. The figure of Prometheus is a splendid emblem and might convey many noble significations, but the motto at once determined the *impresa* or enterprise which the hero had undertaken. And be it noted that the motto of a true *impresa* should not exceed three words. But the *impresa* of Tydeus has an even more direct bearing upon the modern revival, especially when it is remembered that the early Italian writers say that impresas should have a handsome character, and that the ground on which the principal emblem is placed should be filled with appropriate ornament. To quote from Paley's translation: 'On the outside of his shield he bears this arrogant device, a sky wrought on it all blazing with stars; but a bright full moon in the centre of the shield, the queen of stars, the eye of night,

shines conspicuous.' This *impresa* is intentionally left without a motto to enable Eteocles in his answer to turn the device against the enemy: 'As for this night, which you say is pictured on his shield glittering with stars in the sky, it may perchance become prophetic to him by a special meaning. For if night should fall upon his eyes in death, then indeed to the bearer of it this arrogant device would rightly and justly sustain its own name.' The *impresas* of the other chiefs are also given, and it is at once evident that they were in no case family badges, nor were they supposed to be designed by the warriors who bore them; for when describing the device on the shield of Hippomedon the Messenger says: 'the designer, whoever he was, proved himself to be no common artist.' A good *Impresa*, therefore, was as much sought after and as highly prized in ancient Greece as in the Italy of the cinquecento or the England of King James I.

Turning now to the 'Phoenician Virgins' of Euripides we find that the seven chiefs have *impresas*, but not identical with those in Aeschylus, and the entire absence of mottoes necessitates lengthy explanations, and therefore weakens the general effect. For instance the *impresa* of Capaneus is described as 'an earthborn giant carrying on his shoulders a whole city, having by main force torn it up with levers—an intimation to us what our city should suffer.'

The light in which *impresas* were regarded at the period of their revival is nowhere better shown than in the preface of Giovanni Ferro to his monu-

mental folio, the 'Teatro d'Imprese, Venice, 1623.' He begins: 'The subject of Impresas is usually considered very difficult, and is perhaps the most difficult that can be discussed. For Giovio says that it is not in our power even after long reflection to find a device worthy of a given motto, and worthy at the same time of the patron who is to bear it, and of the author who invents it; wherefore, he says, that to compose impresas is the lucky chance of the inventive mind, and that the learned stake their honour and reputation in making them. Taegio confirms this opinion, and adds, that to make an Impresa complete and perfect in every respect is a matter of such difficulty that he regards it as almost impossible. And Annibale Caro, writing to the Duchess of Urbino, says that Impresas are things which are not found by means of books, and are not easily made even with the help of the imagination. Ruscelli affirms that of all the Impresas mentioned by Giovio three-fourths are worthless. The same might be said of those which he himself collected.'

So the doctors disagreed as usual even about impresas! Ferro goes on to observe that the difficulty is not so much due to the subject itself as to the multitude of symbols, differing very slightly and easily mistaken the one for the other. The works of the numerous writers who preceded Ferro in the same field are, as he justly says, almost all very incomplete, ill-arranged, and without indexes. Luca Contile alone, whose book, 'Ragionamenti sopra la proprietà delle Imprese,' was published in 1573; at all approaches Ferro either in wealth of

material or in orderly disposition, but his work is a thin folio of under two hundred leaves, while Ferro's volume has nearly four times as many. Added to this, Ferro published a second folio about as large as Contile's containing his reply to his critics. Contile, however, makes up in enthusiasm for anything and everything that he may lack in other respects. In his eyes the *Impresa* is one of the most noble and excellent things in the world, but he lets his zeal outrun his discretion when he attempts to prove that the Almighty himself invented the first *impresas*! The examples he adduces in support of his argument are the tree of knowledge of good and evil with the motto 'Ne comedes,' and the rainbow with the motto 'Nequaquam ultra interficietur omnis caro aquis.' Judged by the standard rules above mentioned, these are by no means perfect specimens, for the body is in one place and the soul in another, unless we are to suppose that the tree was duly labelled and that the rainbow originally bore an inscription. Of the *Impresa* as a human institution, Jason is claimed to be the founder, but as we have already seen, its pedigree is sufficiently good without these flights of fancy.

It is a curious fact that *impresas* appear to have been revived and to have come into their fullest vogue just as the best occasions for using them were passing away. In the sixteenth century the tournament was already degenerating into running at the ring, and lance thrusts were being exchanged across barriers that precluded all possibility of fighting at close quarters. In fact, the time was ripen-

ing for the immortal work of Cervantes, who, it will be remembered, represents Don Quixote as considering himself bound by the laws of chivalry to bear white armour 'without an *impresa* on his shield until he should gain one by his prowess.'

The subject of *impresas* in England has been so fully dealt with by Mr. Sidney Lee in his above-mentioned article in 'The Times,' and also by Mr. Pollard, from a more bibliographical standpoint, in 'Country Life' of 13th January, that there is little to add, save that in the play of 'Pericles,' though not in the portion recognized as Shakespeare's, there are no less than six *impresas*. The passage is in Act II, Scene 2, where the knights pass before Simonides while his daughter describes them to him:

*Sim.* Who is the first that doth prefer himself?

*Thaisa.* A knight of Sparta, my renowned father;  
And the device he bears upon his shield  
Is a black Æthiop, reaching at the sun;  
The word, *Lux tua vita mihi.*

*Sim.* He loves you well, that holds his life of you.  
Who is the second, that presents himself?

*Thaisa.* A prince of Macedon, my royal father;  
And the device he bears upon his shield  
Is an arm'd knight, that's conquer'd by a lady:  
The motto thus, in Spanish, *Piu per dulçura que per fuerça.*

*Sim.* And what's the third?

*Thaisa.* The third, of Antioch;  
And his device a wreath of chivalry;  
The word, *Me pompæ provexit apex.*

*Sim.* What is the fourth?

*Thaisa.* A burning torch, that's turned upside down;  
The word, *Quod me alit, me extinguit.*

*Sim.* Which shows that beauty hath his power and will,  
Which can as well inflame, as it can kill.

*Thaisa.* The fifth, an hand environed with clouds;  
Holding out gold, that 's by the touchstone tried;  
The motto thus, *Sic spectanda fides.*

*Sim.* And what 's the sixth and last, which the knight  
himself  
With such a graceful courtesy deliver'd?

*Thaisa.* He seems a stranger; but his present is  
A wither'd branch, that 's only green at top;  
The motto, *In hac spe vivo.*

The third, fourth, and fifth, which are good impresas, are found in 'The Heroicall Devices of M. Claudius Paradin. Translated by P. S. London, W. Kearney, 1591.' The others are very poor and were probably the work of George Wilkins, to whom Mr. Lee, in the preface to his handsome reprint of the first edition of 'Pericles, 1609,' published last year, attributes all the play, except the greater part of Acts III and V, and some portions of Act IV. These impresas also occur in Wilkins's novel, 'The Painfull Adventures of Pericles, Prince of Tyre,' published in 1608, the year before the appearance of the play.

As specimens of interesting historical impresas, we may mention the magnificent one of Charles I of Spain (the Emperor Charles V), viz., the Pillars of Hercules, with the motto 'Plus ultra,' in allusion to the extension of discovery and conquest in the New World; and the Gordian Knot and Sword of Ferdinand of Castile with the motto 'Tanto monta,' in allusion to his settlement of family disputes about the succession to the crown by appeal



to the Sword. It gives one rather a shock to read that in the sixteenth century the *impresa* of Silvestro Bottigella of Pavia was a *pianolo*, with the singularly appropriate motto, 'Tuerto y derecho lo igual' (crooked and straight, I make even), until one remembers that *pianola* is old Italian for *pialla*, a carpenter's plane.

And here we take our leave of these devices, suggesting for their own *impresa* a Lumber Room, with the motto, 'Non sine gloria.'

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